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Farquharson, John

He was a weaver's lad

[n.p.]

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HE WAS A WEAVER'S LAD

by

"John Farquharson"



*An address at services in memory of Andrew Carnegie,
New York City, April 25, 1920*



H. WAS a weaver's lad—this boy bearing the name of the practical disciple, Andrew, who became the patron saint of Scotland. I say "practical" for it was Andrew who said when asked how the thousands on the shores of Galilee were to be fed: "There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes, but what are they among so many?" And had this disciple beheld, in the year of his Lord 1847, in the land in which he had become patron saint, the want and misery due to the stopping of the hand looms by the coming of steam machines, and had then seen this wee Dunfermline lad, he might have made much the same remark: "There's a lad here wi' his five senses and twa' sma' han's, but what are they amang sae mony?"

We say that it was a miracle that was performed on the shores of Galilee, when the boy's meagre store was suddenly multiplied to feed the thousands. Was it not as great a miracle that the seemingly petty store of the weaver's lad was transformed (in what is but a moment of time in His sight to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday)—transformed not only into food, but books and music and pictures and other human blessings; and not for a few thousands only but for millions?

In this miracle the Scotch lad had, to be sure, an active, aggressive, shrewd part, but it was no less a miracle; and it was one (and I say it in all reverence)

M. W. L. July 26, 1891

that could not have been wrought even by the Almighty with the aid of this eager lad anywhere else than in free air of America.

I suspect that my knowledge of chemistry is no greater than that of Lord Morley, whose observation about phosphorus in iron ore has just been read; but I am informed that there are mysterious substances known to the chemists as "catalysts" which have such potency that they bring into solution elements before seemingly insoluble and yet are themselves apparently unchanged—substances often so infinitesimal in relation to the effects they produce that it is (according to one who was a teacher in a Carnegie laboratory) as if you were "to dissolve a whole island by throwing a few crystals upon it." So the catalytic, robust, canny spirit of this youth, who never grew old, did incomparable, incommensurate things in the earth.

It was not merely nor chiefly that he touched the ore that was lying in the far hills beyond Superior and transformed it into a girder, a bridge, a steel rail, a bit of armor plate, a beam for a sky-scraper, and in utter human silence, as I have witnessed the process in the flaming sheds of Pittsburgh, with the calm pushing and pulling of a few levers, the accurate shoveling by a few hands and the deliberate testing by a few eyes—wonderful as that all was and is.

And it was not even that in every luminous, white-hot ingot swung in the steel mills in the smoky valley of the Youghiogheny, there was something for the pension of a university professor, something for an artist

in New York or Paris, something for an astronomer on a California mountain, something for the mathematician over his computations, something for the historian over his archives, something for the teacher in the school upon the hill above, something for every worshiper in hundreds of kirks and churches, something for everyone of hundreds of thousands of readers in libraries from Scotland to California, as a result of the multiplication of the childish store in his hands as he stood an immigrant lad on the shores of America, with a "fair and free field" before him.

For beside these there were gifts to millions more than were reached directly and indirectly by the steel ingots. These were the gifts of the alchemy of his personality that touched the spirits and imaginations of men. The material gifts were like those of Prometheus who bestowed upon mortal man the

"bright glory
"Of fire that all arts spring from."

His supreme gifts to mankind were however not those of a demi-god, a Titan, working with the elements of the earth and looking down upon men as inferior creatures for whom he had made sacrifices. They were gifts of a very human, mortal man who loved his fellow-men, who suffered and fought and wept and rejoiced with them as one of them.

He, no doubt, would not wish me to trace the name Andrew, which his Scotch mother gave him, back to the Greek but it was in its origin Greek nevertheless,

the Greek name for "man." And he might have belonged to any age of man beginning with that of Moses or Pericles. He would have stood unembarrassed before any ruler from Pharaoh to Napoleon; and did so stand before the emperors, kings and presidents of his own day. Long before he became famous for his wealth, I have read, he was a personal friend of Gladstone, Matthew Arnold, Herbert Spencer, John Morley and James Bryce. And after he became a world figure, he was still the friend of the lowliest and the poorest.

He was a triumphant democrat with a genius for friendships, as great as the genius in the field in which the word "genius" has been transmuted into the "engine" and the "engineer," with a passionate love for America, with an international mind having an orbit of concern for the cosmos (but with Dunfermline and Pittsburgh as its two foci) and with a love for all things beautiful, but with a preordained taste for that which had a Caledonian form or fragrance or melody in it: the "auld gray toon"; the abbey bell sounding the curfew; the scent of the heather; "songs possessed of souls caught from living lips"; the Scotch mist even which served to remind him "of the mysterious ways of Providence."

And yet he was not servile to his ancestry, the strain of whose thoughts had run through the "radical breasts" (a phrase he has himself used) of his parents. In his love for the voice of the organ, for example, he doubtless shocked many of his psalm-singing com-

patriots as did David when he danced before the Ark of the Lord.—And how pleased Mr Carnegie would be with the program of this afternoon, dominated by music and crowned by an oratorio of which he expressed such discerning appreciation in his delightful story of his travels in Great Britain, for he once said that those who thought music an unworthy intruder in the domain of sacred dogma "should remember that the Bible tells us that in Heaven music is the principal source of happiness—the sermon seems nowhere—and it may go hard with such as fail to give it the first place on earth."

He has, unwittingly no doubt, made the best characterization of himself in the definition of every Scotchman "who is two Scotchmen":

"As his land has the wild, barren, stern crags and mountain peaks around which the tempests blow, and also the smiling valleys below where the wild rose, the foxglove and the bluebell blossom, so the Scotchman, with his rugged force and hard intellect in his head above, has a heart below capable of being touched to the finest issues. * * * Poetry and song are a part of his nature. Touch his head, and he will bargain and argue with you to the last: touch his heart and he falls upon your breast."

These two men did not struggle against each other in the one energetic restless body, but helped each the other. The poet enhaled the deed (for, Mr Carnegie said, "to do things is only one-half of the battle;

to be able to tell the world what you have done, that is the greater accomplishment"). And the hard-headed man put the poetry into everyday life, with an enchanting book, or the celestial voice of an organ, or an illuminating statistic, or an eternal truth for the first time discovered, or a telescope revealing the differing glory of the stars, or the stirring voice of the bag-pipes waking the day, or a symphony ending it.

The Scotch minister whom I heard preach this morning referred to a little shop in Edinburgh in whose window tiny figures of kings and princes and others were displayed, with the sign (which has given title to one of Robert Louis Stevenson's essays) "*A Penny Plain, Two Pence Colored*." Mr Carnegie's figures were all colored—colored by his generous, warm heart.

The two Scotchmen in him were held together in happy partnership by an American tolerance, a New World breadth of generosity (which is not usually associated with the Scotch) and a western humor, which had, however, a tang of the moors in it, and was ever conscious of the ethics of the golf links. I have a vivid memory of one characteristic bit of his kindly quiet wit at my own expense. We had played a few holes in my first game of golf with him, when my conscience, beginning to trouble me, provoked me to question whether I ought to be out in the country away from my work playing golf with him. "Oh," he said quick as a flash, "Pritchett and I will both certify that you are not playing golf."

And when we played our last game together, it was out by the firth of Dornoch, in the first days of the Great War, in August of 1914. After we had finished the game, which he must have divined would be the last, he gave me his putter with this inscription in his own hand: "*A very close game: couldn't have been closer so equally and badly we play.*"

Ah! If we could all but play the game of life as manfully, as cheerfully, as eagerly, as fearlessly, as hopefully, and with as kindly a heart as he, we might well be proud of our score, even though he, a Scotchman, would go no farther than to admit of his own that "*it micht ha' bin waur.*"

* * * * *

Beyond the dark Brook of the Shadow he's gone
On over the hills and the moors toward the dawn,
This Laird o' the castle by Dornoch's gray firth
To find the Great Peace he had sought for the earth.

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Box 121

HE WAS A WEAVER'S LAD

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